

SB0697 – Election Law – Actions to Influence an El

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY

SB0697 – Election Law – Actions to Influence an Election Social Media Platform Algorithms and Bots Purchased by Foreign Nationals

Bill Sponsor: Senator Brian Feldman

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, Co-Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in support of **SB0697** on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists—individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

SB0697 addresses a growing threat to election integrity: the use of social media algorithms, automated accounts, and digital tools purchased by foreign nationals to influence Maryland elections. These tactics can spread misinformation and manipulate public opinion. Maryland must ensure its laws keep pace with evolving digital strategies used to interfere with our democratic institutions.

This bill strengthens protections by prohibiting foreign nationals from using bots or algorithmic tools to influence state or local elections. It also establishes clearer enforcement mechanisms, including a rebuttable presumption regarding social media platform expenditures, to ensure violations are addressed.

SB0697 supports the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition because a core part of our mission is to inform voters about legislation and their legislators. We are committed to preventing any forces—foreign or domestic—from distorting the information Marylanders rely on to make informed choices.

Therefore, we respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0697.

Testimony in support of SB0697 - Actions to Influe

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0697_RichardKaplowitz_FAV

02/25/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#0697- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Election Law - Actions to Influence an Election - Social Media Platform Algorithms and Bots Purchased by Foreign Nationals

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0697, **Election Law - Actions to Influence an Election - Social Media Platform Algorithms and Bots Purchased by Foreign Nationals**

The Indiana University [Observatory on Social Media](#) explained *How foreign operations are manipulating social media to influence your views*¹

Influence campaigns are large-scale efforts to shift public opinion, push false narratives or change behaviors among a target population. [Russia](#), [China](#), [Iran](#), [Israel](#) and other nations have run these campaigns by exploiting [social bots](#), [influencers](#), [media companies](#) and [generative AI](#).

We identify clusters of social media accounts that post in a synchronized fashion, amplify the same groups of users, share identical sets of links, images or hashtags, or perform [suspiciously similar sequences of actions](#). We have uncovered many examples of coordinated inauthentic behavior.

Northeastern University has reported that *New research reveals algorithms' hidden political power - New research shows the impact that social media algorithms can have on partisan political feelings, using a new tool that hijacks the way platforms rank content.*²

This bill will establish a rebuttable presumption that a social media platform has made an independent expenditure to a certain candidate if the social media platform knowingly and purposefully alters its algorithm to amplify certain political content for the benefit of the candidate; prohibiting a foreign national from using a bot to publish, distribute, or disseminate campaign material or artificially amplify political content to users of an online platform for a certain purpose; etc.

This bill will criminalize this misconduct and apply appropriate financial and other penalties on anyone involved in these crimes.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0697.

¹ <https://theconversation.com/how-foreign-operations-are-manipulating-social-media-to-influence-your-views-240089>

² <https://news.northeastern.edu/2025/11/27/social-media-political-polarization-research/>

MDCC_SB 697_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Grason Wiggins

Position: FWA



Senate Bill 697

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Date: February 25, 2026

Founded in 1968, the Maryland Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is the leading voice for business in Maryland. We are a statewide coalition of more than 7,000 members and federated partners working to develop and promote strong public policy that ensures sustained economic health and growth for Maryland businesses, employees, and families.

The Maryland Chamber appreciates the intent of Senate Bill 697 (SB 697). We respectfully request the definition of “social media platform” be amended to reflect the following language:

(5) “social media platform” means a website or mobile application that functions primarily to connect users in order to allow users to interact socially with each other and meets the following criteria:

- (I) Allows users to upload, create, share, and view content to share with other users;
- (II) enables users viewing content to react, comment, or share the content viewed by the user;
- (III) Allows users to construct a public or semipublic profile for purposes of signing into and using the service or application;
- (IV) Allows users to populate a public list of other users with whom an individual shares a social connection within the system.
- (V) A Social Media Platform: does not include:
 - (I) A service or application that provides email or direct messaging services
 - (II) A service or application that consists primarily of news, sports, entertainment, ecommerce, or content that is preselected by the provider, or for which any chat, comments, or interactive functionality is incidental to, directly related to, or dependent on the provision of such content.

The Maryland Chamber’s understanding is that this change create consistency across states by mirroring similar statutes adopted in California, New York, Connecticut, Virginia, Minnesota, and Ohio, and bills being considered in New Jersey and New Hampshire. **For this reason, the Maryland Chamber respectfully requests a favorable with amendments report on SB 697.**

sb697.pdf

Uploaded by: Will Vormelker

Position: INFO

HON. STACY A. MAYER
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
BALTIMORE COUNTY
CHAIR

HON. RICHARD SANDY
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
FREDERICK COUNTY
VICE-CHAIR



KELLEY O'CONNOR
ASSISTANT STATE COURT
ADMINISTRATOR
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
P: (410) 260-1560

SUZANNE PELZ, ESQ.
SNR. GOVT. RELATIONS AND
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
P: (410)260-1523

MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 697
Election Law - Actions to Influence an Election - Social Media
Platform Algorithms and Bots Purchased by Foreign Nationals
DATE: February 18, 2026
(2/25)

INFORMATIONAL COMMENT PAPER

The Judiciary respects the separation of powers doctrine and acknowledges the policy-making authority of the legislative branch. As such, the Judiciary has no position on the policy aims of this legislation.

Although the Judiciary takes no position on this legislation, it wishes to point out that the bill uses the term “seal” rather than “shield.” Sealing a record is a judicial action that requires a judge’s formal order. It typically involves a higher level of privacy protection, restricting access to the entire case record. Sealed cases are hidden from general clerk access and require supervisor or judicial intervention to view or update. Sealing is mostly governed by court rules and is used in sensitive situations requiring confidentiality beyond shielding.

Shielding a record is an administrative action performed by clerks without a judge’s direct involvement. Clerks have the authority to shield records to protect certain information from public disclosure. Shielded cases remain active and accessible internally to court staff but are protected from public view. Shielding is primarily

statutory and often applies to specific types of information or cases, such as dismissed or denied peace or protective orders, or victim/witness identifying information.

cc. Hon. Brian Feldman
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor